

# St. Patrick's Day: 'Time is a good storyteller'

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**A**n Irish proverb says, "There are two versions of a story and twelve arrangements to a song." So it is with St. Patrick and his day.

## Birth of a legend



St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, was born in Scotland. As a boy he was captured and taken to Ireland as a slave to serve as a shepherd.

During this time, he turned to prayer and learned his captors' language and their customs.

He later escaped Ireland, only to come back years later to convert the pagan Irish to Christianity.

## Stories about snakes

It has long been told that during his mission in Ireland, St. Patrick once stood on a hilltop and, with a wooden staff by his side, drove out all the snakes from Ireland.

However, the island nation was never home to any snakes. "Driving out the snakes" was a metaphor for the purge of pagan ideology from Ireland and the victory of Christianity.

## Tradition or trend?

St. Patrick's Day is observed March 17. This is Patrick's religious feast day and the anniversary of his death in the fifth century. The Irish have observed this day as a religious holiday for thousands of years.

On St. Patrick's Day, which occurs during the Christian season of Lent, Irish families would traditionally go to church in the morning and celebrate in the afternoon.

Lenten prohibitions against the eating of meat were relinquished and people would dance, drink and feast on a traditional meal of Irish bacon and cabbage.

Until the 1970s, Irish laws ordered that pubs be closed on March 17. In 1995, however, the Irish government began a national campaign to use St. Patrick's Day as an opportunity to promote tourism.

## Shamrock sham?

On St. Patrick's Day, shamrocks abound. The shamrock is

associated with St. Patrick because it is said he used it to explain the Holy Trinity, since its leaves form a triad.

However, this legend cannot be proven. In fact, the first written mention of this story did not appear until approximately 1,000 years after St. Patrick's death.

Previously, the Druids considered the shamrock a sacred plant symbolizing the rebirth of spring. By the 17th century, the shamrock had become a representation of rising Irish nationalism.

## Little green men

Leprechauns, although associated with St. Patrick's Day, have nothing to do with St. Patrick. The original Irish name for them is *lobaircin*, meaning "small-bodied fellow." Leprechauns probably stem from the Celtic belief in fairies.

In Celtic folktales, leprechauns were irritable souls, responsible for mending the shoes of other fairies. They were known for their trickery, which they used to protect their treasure of gold.

## Celebrating 'Irish-style'

Each year, thousands of Irish-Americans get together with their family on St. Patrick's Day to share a "traditional" meal of corned beef and cabbage.

Although cabbage has long been an Irish food, corned beef only began its connection with St. Patrick's Day at the turn of the century. Irish immigrants living in New York City's Lower East Side substituted corned beef for their traditional dish of Irish bacon to save money.

The first St. Patrick's Day parade took place in the United States. Irish soldiers serving in the English military marched through New York City March 17, 1762.

Over the next 35 years, Irish patriotism thrived among immigrants to America.

In 1848, several New York Irish Aid societies elected to merge their parades to form one New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade.

Today, according to the History Channel, the event is the world's oldest civilian parade and is the largest in the United States – averaging 75 floats and 150,000 participants.

Research sources: [www.historychannel.com](http://www.historychannel.com) and [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org).

## 'Irish eyes' online

- <http://allaboutirish.com>
- [www.irelandseye.com](http://www.irelandseye.com)
- [www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie)
- [www.nationalgallery.ie](http://www.nationalgallery.ie)
- [www.irishroots.net](http://www.irishroots.net)
- [www.irish-culture.ch](http://www.irish-culture.ch)
- [www.ireland.com](http://www.ireland.com)
- [www.ireland.org](http://www.ireland.org)
- [www.irlgov.ie](http://www.irlgov.ie)



St. Patrick confronts the "snakes of Ireland" in this image from Catholic Online ([www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org)).

## St. Patrick's Day Celebrations

### Slider's All Ranks Lounge

Steve Reeves joins two other Irish musicians to play traditional and folk music. Irish delicacies will be provided, along with party favors for a \$5 cover charge.

**March 14, 8 p.m.**

### Robinson Barracks Community Club

Pandora's Box hosts a St. Paddy's party.

**March 15, 9 p.m.**

### Back Lot

Barry P. Foley entertains revelers.

**March 15, 9 p.m.**

